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GEORGIA'S PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT IMPROVED, BUT NDI CODE OF CONDUCT USED TO SOLVE RATHER THAN PREVENT PROBLEMS

TBILISI – Georgian political parties that signed the National Democratic Institute’s (NDI) Code of Conduct made progress toward ensuring accountability of party candidates and activists in the campaign leading up to May 21 parliamentary elections. But they used the code more often to resolve problems than to prevent them, NDI announced at a news conference today.

NDI also noted that a number of positive steps were taken in the last weeks of the campaign to improve the electoral environment but problems remained, particularly intimidation of observers and activists.

Those conclusions were among several in a report, released at the news conference, of a long-term observation mission conducted in Georgia by NDI between April 17 and June 1. The NDI observers met with parliamentary candidates, national and local political leaders and election officials, senior government officials, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, the media and the diplomatic community and traveled throughout the country.

Though focused on the Code of Conduct, the report also addresses several issues related to the wider election. While noting several cases where the government and election officials acted to resolve problems, the report offers a series of recommendations to improve the conduct of future elections. These include steps to improve the voters list, strengthen election legislation and hold election officials accountable for irregularities.

On April 11, NDI published a Code of Conduct for Political Parties that has been signed by nine parties. Under the code, the parties agreed to take responsibility for the conduct of their leaders, candidates, members of the election administration, election observers and activists. NDI said it discussed complaints with the parties concerned and urged them to take immediate and concrete steps to distribute and enforce the code.

“The report we are releasing today covers the work of our long term observation mission, who have monitored implementation of the Code of Conduct for political parties and steps taken since the release of our pre-election assessment statement” said Mary O’Hagan, NDI’s senior resident representative in Georgia. “NDI appreciates the active participation of the signatory parties in the process of raising and responding to complaints but notes that parties were less successful in using the code to prevent problems. NDI is pleased that all the signatory parties are interested in developing a similar framework to raise standards during the period after the elections.”

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